

JULY 27, 1976

ELECTION '76: THE POLITICS OF THE SUNBELT
(TAPE INSERTS IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR:

AMERICAN NEWSMEN AND POLITICIANS ARE USING A NEW TERM THESE DAYS: "THE SUNBELT." IT DESCRIBES A VAST ARC OF LAND STRETCHING FROM THE SOUTH-ATLANTIC STATES TO THE FAR WEST, AN AREA KNOWN FOR ITS GENERALLY MODERATE IF NOT SUN-BATHED CLIMATE. THE SUDDEN, RAPID GROWTH OF THIS REGION AFFECTS NOT JUST WHERE AMERICANS LIVE AND WORK BUT PERHAPS HOW THEY MAY VOTE IN THE FUTURE. CHARLES MEDD HAS A REPORT ON THE SUNBELT.

VOICE:

AMERICANS ARE ON THE MOVE AGAIN, NOT SO MUCH FROM CITY TO SUBURB, AS WE WERE IN THE IMMEDIATE POST-WAR PERIOD, BUT EVEN FURTHER. THIS TIME, THE MIGRATION IS AWAY FROM THE TRADITIONAL POPULATION AND INDUSTRIAL CENTERS OF THE NORTHEAST QUADRANT OF THE COUNTRY TO POINTS SOUTH AND WEST. IF THE TREND CONTINUES, THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU SAYS THAT BY NINETEEN EIGHTY MORE AMERICANS WILL BE LIVING IN THE SUNBELT THAN ANYWHERE ELSE. AND BECAUSE CONGRESSIONAL SEATS ARE APPORTIONED BY POPULATION, IT MEANS THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE NATION'S HISTORY THE BALANCE OF POLITICAL POWER IS MOVING FROM THE REGION WHERE THE ORIGINAL COLONIES BEGAN.

THE MIGRATION BEGAN A QUARTER-CENTURY AGO AS STATES ACROSS THE SUNBELT LAUNCHED INDUSTRIALIZATION PROGRAMS. THE PROMISE OF CHEAP, NON-UNION LABOR, INEXPENSIVE POWER, LOW-COST AND EVEN FREE LAND FOR CONSTRUCTION, AND A VARIETY OF TAX INCENTIVES SERVED AS AN INDUCEMENT FOR HUNDREDS AND LATER THOUSANDS OF

NORTHERN-BASED COMPANIES TO MOVE. AS THESE COMPANIES THRIVED IN THEIR NEW ENVIRONMENT, MANY AMERICANS FOLLOWED IN SEARCH OF THE JOBS THEY OFFERED. OTHERS WENT SIMPLY TO GET AWAY FROM CROWDED CITIES AND TO LESS CONGESTED AREAS THAT PROMISED NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND PLENTY OF SUNSHINE.

SOME SEE THE DRAMATIC EMERGENCE OF THE SUNBELT AS FORESHADOWING A MAJOR SHIFT IN THE NATION'S ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL POWER. BUT NOT EVERYONE AGREES, INCLUDING JOHN SIEGENTHALER, PUBLISHER OF THE NASHVILLE TENNESSEAN, AN INFLUENTIAL NEWSPAPER WITHIN THE SO-CALLED SUNBELT REGION:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- SIEGENTHALER

"I REALLY THINK THAT THE SUNBELT CONCEPT IS MYTHOLOGICAL. I DON'T FIND ANY ECONOMIC OR POLITICAL CONTINUITY ACROSS WHAT'S CALLED THE SUNBELT. I DON'T THINK WE'RE ABOUT TO CHANGE THE STRUCTURE OF OUR NATION OR ITS ECONOMIC BASE PERMANENTLY. WE'LL GO THROUGH A PERIOD IN WHICH STATES NOW COMMONLY CALLED THE SUNBELT VIE FOR A LARGER SHARE OF THE RESOURCES OF THE LAND. BUT THAT'S NOT GOING TO BE LIMITED TO THE SUNBELT, YOU KNOW. OTHER SECTIONS OF THIS COUNTRY -- THE FAR WEST, THE NORTHWEST, THE MIDWEST, THE DEEP SOUTH -- ARE GOING TO FIGHT LIKE BLAZES TO GET A PIECE OF THE ACTION, TOO."

VOICE:

HISTORICALLY, MANY, IF NOT MOST OF THE SUNBELT STATES HAVE BEEN KNOWN FOR THEIR POLITICAL CONSERVATISM. AND IN HIS CAMPAIGN FOR THE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION, FORMER CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR RONALD REAGAN SEEMED TO HAVE DEVELOPED A SUNBELT STRATEGY, A CONSERVATIVE MESSAGE AIMED AT THE GROWING ELECTORAL STRENGTH OF THE SOUTH AND WEST. DURING THE RECENT PRIMARY ELECTIONS, REAGAN SCORED HIS MOST IMPRESSIVE VICTORIES IN SUNBELT STATES.

BUT PUBLISHER SIEGENTHALER DOUBTS IT WILL WORK IN THE GENERAL ELECTION, SHOULD THE CALIFORNIAN BECOME THE NOMINEE.

TAPE: CUT TWO -- SIEGENTHALER

"I THINK TO ASSUME THAT THE GENERAL POPULATION IS OVERWHELMINGLY CONSERVATIVE IS A MISTAKE. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THAT ELEMENT IN MISTER REAGAN'S PARTY IN THE SUNBELT IS MORE CONSERVATIVE. BUT IN TERMS OF THE GENERAL POPULATION, I REALLY DON'T THINK, FIRST OF ALL, THAT THEY ARE THAT POLITICIZED. I THINK THEY VOTE THEIR POCKEBOOK FIRST, AND THE CANDIDATE AND PARTY (THAT) IN A GIVEN YEAR AND A GIVEN TIME APPEALS MORE DRAMATICALLY AND MORE INTELLIGENTLY TO POCKETBOOK, BREAD-AND-BUTTER ISSUES IS THE CANDIDATE WHO WILL CARRY THE SUNBELT STATES."

VOICE:

JUST HOW CONSERVATIVE THE SUNBELT VOTERS ARE, AND HOW MUCH INFLUENCE THEY WILL HAVE IN THE COMING ELECTION, WILL NOT BE KNOWN UNTIL NOVEMBER. BUT ONE THING CLEAR IS THE REGION'S GROWING POLITICAL VISIBILITY. TWO OF THE LAST THREE AMERICAN PRESIDENTS -- LYNDON JOHNSON OF TEXAS AND RICHARD NIXON OF CALIFORNIA; AND THIS YEAR'S DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE -- JIMMY CARTER OF GEORGIA -- ARE ALL PRODUCTS OF THE SUNBELT. WHETHER OR NOT THIS SHIFT OF POWER IS PERMANENT, THE POLITICAL AUTHORITY LONG ENJOYED BY THE NORTHEAST AND MIDWEST IS SLIPPING, AND SLIPPING FAST.

GH/PBM